

**digital**conservancy

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Deposit Agreement

I represent that I am the creator of the digital material identified herein ("Work"). I represent that the Work is original and that I either own all rights of copyright or have the right to deposit the copy in a digital archive such as the Conservancy. I represent that the regard to any non-original material included in the Work I have secured written permission of the copyright owner(s) for this use or believe this use to be allowed by law. I further represent that I have included all appropriate credits and attributions. I hereby grant to the Regents of the University of Minnesota ("University"), through its University Digital conservancy, a non-exclusive right to access, reproduce and distribute the Work, in whole or in part, for the purposes of security, preservation and perpetual access. I grant the University a limited non-exclusive right to make derivative works for the purpose of migrating the Work to other media or formats in order to preserve access to the Work. I do not transfer or intend to transfer any right of copyright or other intellectual property to the University.

Work(s) to be deposited:

Title: Federal Advocacy Analysis for the League of Minnesota Cities

Author's Name*:

Casey Casella
Print


Signature of Author or Authorized Representative

*(See back page for additional names and signatures if there is more than one author)

Name (please print): Casey Casella

Address: 340 Marshall Ave Apt #1
St. Paul, MN 55102

Date: 8/31/2017

If the Deposit Agreement is executed by the Author's Representative, the Representative shall separately execute the following representation.

I represent that I am authorized by the Author to execute this Deposit Agreement on behalf of the Author.

Author's Representative Signature

Date: _____

FEDERAL ADVOCACY FOR LMC

Federal Advocacy Analysis for the League of Minnesota Cities

MPP Professional Paper

In Partial Fulfillment of the Master of Public Policy Degree Requirements

The Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs

The University of Minnesota

Casey Casella

Aug. 29th, 2017

Paper Chair: Dr. Barbara Crosby

Committee Member: Dr. Paul Soper

Abstract

This paper documents the development of the League of Minnesota Cities federal advocacy program. Intern Casey Casella worked as the federal advocacy coordinator to launch the advocacy efforts in the summer of 2017. This paper details the history and current situation of federal advocacy at the League, followed by an analysis of best practices from other state leagues and Minnesota organizations. Next, the foundations and goals of the advocacy development are described, along with a summary of work completed in 2017. Finally, the paper provides recommendations and resources for the League of Minnesota Cities future in federal advocacy.

Keywords: Federal policy, federal advocacy, lobbying, resources, recommendations.

Main Abbreviations Used:

- League of Minnesota Cities – LMC
- National League of Cities – NLC
- Intergovernmental Relations Department – IGR
- Minnesota Association of Small Cities - MAOSC
- Minnesota Association of Townships - MAT
- Minnesota School Boards Association – MSBA
- Association of Minnesota Counties – AMC
- Minnesota Council of Nonprofits - MCN

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction – page 3
II.	Background – page 4
a.	History – page 5
b.	Current Situation – page 7
III.	Analysis of Other Organizations’ Federal Advocacy Efforts – page 8
a.	Methodology – page 8
b.	State Leagues – page 8
c.	Minnesota Organizations – page 10
d.	Best Practices – page 14
IV.	Federal Advocacy Foundations – page 15
V.	2017 Federal Advocacy Efforts – page 16
a.	Summary of 2017 Efforts – page 16
b.	Tasks Accomplished – page 19
VI.	Recommendations – page 23
VII.	Resources – page 25
a.	How to Prioritize Issues – page 25
b.	Resources for Implementation – page 26
c.	Evaluative Criteria – page 27
d.	Outcomes – page 29
VIII.	Conclusion – page 31

Federal Advocacy Analysis for the League of Minnesota Cities

The League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) is a membership organization dedicated to promoting excellence in local government. The League serves more than 800 Minnesota member cities through advocacy, education and training, and policy development. The organization's advocacy efforts include monitoring and lobbying the state government on issues pertaining to Minnesota cities. Policy advocacy beyond the state level is handled by the National League of Cities (NLC), of which the League of Minnesota Cities is an active member. This year, the executive director and staff at LMC decided to re-assess its federal advocacy efforts and relationships.

This reassessment emerged as a League of Minnesota Cities organizational goal after the executive director spoke with other state leagues with strong federal programs. The League staff realized they were missing opportunities to tell the “city story” and influence policy at the federal level. They believed the League could work to increase awareness of the effect of federal laws on Minnesota cities.

Currently, the intergovernmental relations (IGR) department at the League is concentrated on state issues and does not have the resources to monitor federal issues, particularly during the Minnesota legislative session which runs January through May. The federal advocacy project therefore needed another staff member to lead the initiative. Casey has been an administration intern at the League since September 2016, and attends graduate school at the Humphrey School focusing on public policy and politics. She accepted the opportunity to lead the federal advocacy project for the summer of 2017, serving as a federal advocacy coordinator. The federal advocacy work that Casey completed at the League is the basis of this professional paper.

Background

Strengthening the League's federal advocacy program has been considered throughout the organization. The executive director started the conversation in 2015. Missing any opportunities for enhancing the national clout of Minnesota cities is not compliant with the League's value of promoting excellence in local government. The League strives to support cities by providing resources and information cities have difficulty obtaining themselves. Cities, even large ones, rarely have the comprehensive resources to monitor and respond to all federal issues that affect them. League staff therefore set out to develop a federal advocacy structure that could be reactive to pressing issues, yet proactive for broad strategy and development. The staff set an ambitious goal of responding to an issue within one day. Federal issues move fast, and having such a quick response makes sense.

One of the foremost complications that emerged in developing Minnesota's federal advocacy was the slim likelihood Minnesota would be able to make an impact at the federal level. Our state population, and therefore representation, is less influential in the national scale. The Minnesota congressional delegation sits on three budget committees, but does not hold major leadership positions in either legislative body. Staff weighed this drawback against the League's mission to be a frontrunner in advocacy, knowing that there is the potential for advancement, despite the small influence.

To deal with the enormous amount of information and policy on the federal level, staff decided to prioritize issues that significantly impact cities, a stance similar to the League's approach to state issues. Funding and appropriations are issues that member cities continually highlight as priorities, along with the general principle to uphold local control. In addition to

these ongoing priorities, League staff will choose five specific federal issue priorities every year, on the recommendation of staff in the intergovernmental relations department.

Establishing a federal program at the League will increase consistency of responding to federal issues. Reacting to relevant policies as they come up will reduce the odds of missed advocacy opportunities. It also can proactively build relationships and resources to bolster overall influence at the federal level. At the same time, developing a federal advocacy program is a great deal of work. The potential for opportunities must be weighed against the amount of time and resources needed to build a credible program.

History

In the past, LMC has included a federal advocacy component in the form of a committee and a dedicated staff member. One of the League's past policy committees was the Federal Legislative committee. Members brought forward issues for federal priorities. To run this committee, the League designated an intergovernmental relations staff member to track and work with federal issues.

In the mid 1990's as part of IGR's policy process restructure, the dedicated federal committee was replaced by seven issue area committees - each with a federal component. Committees still have policies and bills pertaining to federal legislation, but there is no formal committee or staff for federal advocacy. This is not to say the League has no federal involvement. Issues are brought up in their respective policy committees alongside state issues.

The League of Minnesota Cities relies on its national organization for federal advocacy. The National League of Cities (NLC) was founded on the basis of representing all cities' priorities at the federal level. The League of Minnesota Cities is a member of NLC in order to help get its voice heard at the national level. NLC has three distinct roles as part of LMC:

1. Act as the eyes and ears in Washington D.C. for LMC. This includes tracking and reporting on issues that have the potential to affect cities, notifying LMC when it can play a role or gather support, and sending out regular emails to update LMC staff on Washington D.C. politics.
2. NLC facilitates federal policymaking with its policy committees and priorities. City officials from NLC member cities can serve on the yearly committees.
3. NLC lobbies for local government at the nation's capital. They provide responses to legislation and access to legislators for each member state.

The League of Minnesota Cities and individual city members of NLC participate in NLC's policy process by serving on committees, boards, and councils. They are the grassroots of NLC's organization, bringing the knowledge and expertise of local government. In response to NLC requests, LMC's IGR staff contacts members of the Minnesota congressional delegation to advocate for cities. IGR staff sometimes also independently contact federal legislators about an issue. NLC staff have indicated that they view the Minnesota congressional delegation positively and as being generally supportive of the city agenda. Yet, only 30 out of 855 cities in Minnesota are paying members of the National League of Cities.

League staff and members were at one time more involved in federal issues through NLC. Over the years this connection has been harder to maintain. First, the NLC annual conference in March coincides with an extremely busy time in Minnesota's state legislative session. The League's intergovernmental relations staff are unable to attend NLC's conference due to conflicts with their work at the Minnesota Capitol. Second, IGR staff felt the frequent staff turnover at NLC made building a strong relationship difficult. Today IGR staff note the situation is improving because of reduced staff turnover in the past few years.

Current Situation

Today, federal advocacy at the League is largely reactive. Policy liaisons in the IRG department coordinate communication with NLC. Another key area for improvement is the League's lack of comprehensive working relationship with the Minnesota congressional delegation. There are many examples of interactions between staff, but these collaborations are erratic. The League and congressional staff interact, but the League Board or members are rarely involved. One of the goals of any advocacy program is to have a working relationship with members and staff of Congress (Baumgartner, 2009). The League should be the primary resource for information on policies affecting cities for members of Congress and their staff.

The League's relationship with the National League of Cities must also be considered. NLC membership and involvement is voluntary and not endorsed by LMC. Consequently, there are only 11 city officials who participate on NLC policy committees out of the 30 NLC member cities in the state. If the League seeks to grow its federal advocacy, a natural first step is building a relationship with NLC while also promoting NLC involvement to LMC members. The National League of Cities offers abundant resources for federal advocacy to its member cities. The following are a list of federal advocacy resources NLC possesses that LMC could take advantage of:

- The practical knowledge of how D.C. functions. NLC offers extensive manuals and guides on best practices for contacting, writing, and advocating on the federal level. The guides can be found in the federal advocacy webinar on the NLC University website.
- NLC has relationships with U.S. congressional staff and elected officials. The lobbying team at NLC works with Capitol staff every day. They have inside contacts and are

willing to use those contacts to ensure a state league letter or meeting request is flagged as a priority.

- NLC provides information on how federal issues affect cities and publishes specific issue-based strategies for advocacy. The NLC website provides issue-specific pages that contain the research. This information is distributed in a timely manner using email action alerts.

Analysis of Other Organizations' Federal Advocacy Efforts

Methodology

The following section is an analysis of other organizations' federal advocacy structures and efforts. The data gathered in this section was collected by qualitative research methods. I researched each organization's background by reading their website and their publications on federal policy. After this background research, I wrote questions for the executive director or policy manager of the organization to answer. They were interviewed in person or via phone to gather the specifics of the federal programs. My notes from these interviews were then coded into sections and summarized. This section is written from those notes.

State Leagues

In the initial stages of the federal advocacy project, NLC staff identified five exemplary state leagues for the League to research. These five state leagues were identified because of their sustained focus on federal issues, separate from their general participation in NLC. The activities and structures of these state leagues may suggest best practices for the League of Minnesota Cities.

Florida League of Cities

The Federal Action Strike Team (FAST) is a formal committee run through the Florida League of Cities that draws around 30 city members connected to the Florida congressional delegation. The members use their relationships with federal elected officials to communicate the Florida League's federal priorities and lobby for specific issues. The federal priorities are determined through the Resolutions Committee that meets once a year at the Florida League of Cities annual conference.

Georgia Municipal Association

The Georgia Municipal Association established the Federal Policy Council (FPC) as an advocacy-only body for Georgia. The council recruits members that have existing relationships with federal elected officials. The council's priorities are selected by the Georgia Municipal Association's policy committees. Members of the Federal Policy Council advocate for the priorities through persuasive informational memos and advocacy meetings with elected officials.

Virginia Municipal Association

The Virginia Municipal Association recently formed a Federal Advisory Council to engage at the federal level and to explore ways to engage the Virginia local government community on federal advocacy issues. The Federal Advisory Council is made up of 11 members, one from each congressional district.

Members of the Council and staff at the Virginia Municipal Association monitor federal legislation. Members and staff build their relationship with their delegation by consistently meeting with congress people in D.C. and home offices. The Council strategizes targeted outreach to their congressional staff to influence legislation. The Virginia Municipal Association also relies on NLC to share information and resources. In return, the association makes a point to

send members to NLC events. Since starting the Federal Advisory Council, Virginia staff point out their relationship with NLC has grown. The two groups now work more effectively together.

League of California Cities

At the League of California Cities, an intergovernmental relations staff person is assigned federal issues. This staff member serves as a liaison to a contracted lobbyist at the U.S. Capitol. Federal priorities are put together by the staff member based on the League's strategic goals, information from the contracted lobbyist, and questions from members. The final priority document is adopted by the board of directors and sent to the lobbyist to carry out.

Association of Washington Cities

Washington uses a Federal Legislative Subcommittee to develop federal legislative priorities, make recommendations to the Board of Directors, and play an active role as ambassadors to the state's congressional delegation. The committee has a detailed policy development process that uses NLC as a resource for policy issue ideas. The committee members meet multiple times a year, always once at the NLC annual conference in March.

Minnesota Organizations

The League of Minnesota Cities is not the only advocacy organization working with local units of government in the state of Minnesota. Many of these other organizations coordinate and engage in federal advocacy. League staff reached out to a handful of these organizations to gather best practices.

Minnesota Association of Small Cities (MAOSC)

The executive director and board of MAOSC are committed to advocating at the federal level. Staff became more involved in federal policy a few years ago, and recognize the surge has been effective in receiving more federal funding and substantial policy changes. The executive

director coordinates and responds to most of the organization's federal inquiries and advocacy efforts. The executive director and six board members fly to Washington, D.C., annually in June. They meet with elected officials or staff to advocate on relevant issues.

MAOSC has a contract with a Washington, D.C., consultant to monitor issues and connect MAOSC staff when appropriate. The consultant schedules the meeting for the MAOSC fly-in in June and writes a monthly federal update for the organization's newsletter to update members. Congressional district staff also have a history of attending MAOSC board meetings. Congressional staff give an update on happenings in Washington, D.C., and the MAOSC staff respond with their perspective on the relevant happenings. The strong relationship with the congressional staffers and the MAOSC board fosters the sharing of ideas, perspectives, and collaboration.

MAOSC also has a working relationship with the National League of Cities, and sends members to the NLC annual conference. Staff notes they would like to increase their engagement with NLC and send more members to the NLC conferences in the future. Overall, MAOSC staff believe their amplified federal efforts have paid off. The Washington, D.C., trips have been beneficial to a working relationship with elected officials and collaborations on policy change.

Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT)

The Minnesota Association of Townships coordinates its federal policy and advocacy through the National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT). This organization represents eight state township associations at the U.S. Capitol. They have a contract with a D.C. lobby firm and a few administrative staff to run the organization.

The executive director manages federal advocacy for MAT by responding to information requests, giving federal updates at regional meetings, and serving on the NATaT board.

Members of MAT are generally curious about federal policy, and have opportunities to engage on the federal level through the organization's Washington, D.C., visit in May. Two members, five board members, and the executive director visit their congressional delegation annually. The Legislative and Research Committee develops MAT's federal policies from these congressional meetings. Issues that often emerge on MAT's federal policies are transportation, broadband, and taxes. Overall, MAT is involved in federal advocacy and policy development.

Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)

The Minnesota School Boards Association has a federal aspect to its advocacy efforts. Communications staff, government relations staff, and the executive director all play a role in monitoring legislation, cultivating relationships with federal policymakers, and distributing information to members. Staff and the executive committee attend a national day on the hill in Washington, D.C., in January every year. Staff strategically select what issues and what members to target for the Washington, D.C., fly-in. Staff also maintain relationships with the congressional delegation through occasional district meetings, especially when a member sits on a relevant education committee.

The Minnesota school boards have the National School Boards Association to represent them in Washington, D.C., as a presence in policymaking. The national association forwards information and advocacy opportunities to MSBA. Issues that often require federal partnership are teacher pension, special education, and nation-wide education standards such as Common Core. The prominence of these issues in the everyday functions of school boards explains MSBA's staff dedication to federal advocacy.

Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC)

Staff at the Association of Minnesota Counties are going through a similar process as LMC to analyze their federal involvement and possibly expand their federal advocacy efforts. Currently, AMC has a contract lobbyist and intergovernmental service staff with experience in federal policymaking. Several large counties in Minnesota already have their own federal lobbyist in Washington. Most use the same lobbying firm AMC uses. All AMC members are updated on the federal perspective through a recurring column in AMC's newspaper and an oral update from the contract lobbyist during AMC's conferences. Recurring federal issues and priorities for counties are health and human services, water infrastructure, workforce development, and criminal justice.

The Association of Minnesota Counties has a strong relationship with its national organization, the National Association of Counties (NACo). Member counties in Minnesota are comprehensively involved in NACo. Members have been past presidents, committee chairs, and avid conference attendees. AMC engages with the National Association of Counties on social media and includes occasional federal news in legislative updates to members through email and newsletter. Minnesota members and staff regularly attend the NACo annual conference in February at the U.S. Capitol. The executive director and president of AMC schedule an additional fly-in to Washington, D.C., to meet the Minnesota delegation each year to lobby on specific issues.

Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (MCN)

To navigate the changing federal policy landscape, MCN launched a new federal policy campaign in May of 2017 to provide the latest updates, tools, and resources needed by nonprofits to influence decision making at the federal level. The campaign aims to empower the non-profit

sector and local chapters to engage their citizens in federal advocacy. MCN has hosted a training on the federal budget process, which received positive feedback and engagement. The organization plans to host various webinars and in-person trainings on federal issues in the future.

The federal policy campaign is coordinated through MCN's public policy team. The federal policy coordinator, a new full-time position for MCN, manages the federal policy campaign. The policy director and deputy policy director are also involved. The foundation for MCN's federal campaign is fostering citizen engagement, instead of lobbying federal policymakers. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits relies on the National Council on Nonprofits to handle the lobbying on federal issues.

Best Practices

Research on other organizations' federal advocacy programs suggest a few best practices that LMC should keep in mind:

- Build relationships with Congress members' district offices. Compared to Washington office staff, district staff have lower turnover, are connected to the community, and meetings can be arranged at a low cost. Focusing on district offices, however, should not replace an annual D.C. trip. Many organizations spoke highly of the effectiveness of a well-planned fly-in. Additionally, a connection in the district office can help set up the Washington trip.
- Strategically plan messaging and communications. Upholding local control and funding should be a consistent theme. Successful advocates know how to keep the message consistent yet fresh in every meeting. Be brief with any communications to the delegation; a simple rule is no more than a page for any form of communication.

- Target congressional advocacy appropriately. LMC staff should take time to know the interests and voting records of the Minnesota delegation. Targeted outreach is usually the most effective way to get heard on the federal level.
- Use the National League of Cities as a resource. All 49 state leagues are members of NLC. The most engaged members have a working relationship with NLC in addition to their own federal advocacy program.

Federal Advocacy Foundations

The first step taken in federal advocacy development for the League was to write a background paper and present it to the League Board of Directors. Staff wrote a report and hosted a discussion with the board on goals of a federal advocacy plan in December of 2016. After considering a range of options laid out in the report, the board decided to move forward with a federal advocacy program using existing staff and policy committees. Staff then returned the next month with a more concrete work plan for the year. The board officially approved the plan in January 2017.

Shortly after, staff began to follow the work plan. One of tasks was to convene the Minnesota city officials who serve on NLC policy committees. The 11 members were brought together in early March for the first time. The group reviewed the federal advocacy work plan, shared experiences of the NLC committees, and considered how LMC can assist in their role. Staff continue to contact the NLC policy committee members, and have asked the city officials for feedback on aspects of the federal advocacy program.

LMC staff and Minnesota NLC policy committee members attended the annual Congressional City Conference in March. They met with all members of the Minnesota

delegation. Although this happens every year, the group had heightened enthusiasm and purpose this year due to the federal advocacy work plan.

In June, NLC staff joined LMC at the annual conference in Rochester, Minnesota. This was the first time NLC staff attended a state league conference for relationship building. The NLC executive director gave remarks to the whole conference. Having NLC staff at the conference demonstrated commitment to partner and strengthen a relationship with NLC. Staff also planned a federal advocacy meeting with thirty NLC, LMC and Minnesota city officials on NLC policy committees. The meeting was to establish relationships and discuss federal policies broadly. The meeting provided a few more goals and expectations for the federal advocacy program.

2017 Federal Advocacy Efforts

Summary of 2017 Efforts

Federal advocacy work has been initiated by a team of core staff in administration, IGR, and member services, with communications staff added in July. These staff members have met monthly since the board adopted federal advocacy goals in January. Federal advocacy, though, is a broader organizational goal that must engage all relevant departments. The leadership of the core staff has prompted federal initiatives in many relevant departments. A brief description of each department's efforts follows.

- Administration: Federal advocacy has been a part of the League's executive director goals for the past two years. In 2016, the goal was to analyze opportunities for growth in federal advocacy. The 2017 goal is to continue to support the progress of federal advocacy and provide evaluative criteria. The administration department continues to provide leadership in supporting federal advocacy at the League.

- **Communications:** Various communications staff have created documents for federal advocacy. An example is the 2017 Federal Issues Highlights one-pager. The communications department also uses LMC social media, news updates, and a website to feature federal advocacy efforts. Staff in this department continue to work on the “federal issues” website update.
- **Human Resources:** Staff is keeping up to date with federal policy and writing information memos to help cities understand new federal laws, such as changes in the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- **Research, Litigation, and General Counsel:** These departments focus on federal rulemaking, and the General Counsel is committed to making federal advocacy a priority. These departments are attentive to any rulemaking or legal aspects of federal policy the League can get involved in. A recent example is Research Attorney Pamela Whitmore’s work in rulemaking affecting small cell deployment. Pamela monitored and responded to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Notice for Comments regarding small cell deployment. She also participated in a working group for NLC’s newest Municipal Action Guide on wireless siting. Research attorney Amber Eisenschenk is heading up efforts to formally respond to the Department of Justice (DOJ) Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) for the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessibility requirements for state and local government websites. Currently, the DOJ is projecting the comment period for this rulemaking to close September 2017. The research and general counsel departments are also actively monitoring other federal agency rulemaking activities with the goal of better preparedness for advocating on behalf of members.

- Intergovernmental relations: The League staff in the intergovernmental relations department are key subject matter experts for federal advocacy. The League's approach to federal relations has historically tended to be more issue-specific, rather than focused on a broad interaction with all federal-city issues that may arise. Staff members focus on core issues they work with at the state legislature. When an issue elevates to the federal level, they dedicate as much time as their schedules permit to also monitoring and advocating.
 - Small cell legislation was an important issue this past year at both the state and national level. Laura Ziegler is the staff lead on small cell wireless legislation. Laura and Pam Whitmore worked together to share information, coordinate policy responses, and communicate with cities and other state leagues and national stakeholders. Laura presented a webinar on Small Cell Wireless Legislation in March to the National Telecommunications Officers and Administrators (NATOA). She was a panelist at the Minnesota Association of Community Telecommunications Administrators (MACTA) in June with U.S. Senate staff to discuss small cell wireless and broadband legislation. Laura has fielded numerous calls from other Leagues and interested parties updating them on the Minnesota small cell wireless legislation.
 - Transportation is another important federal priority. Anne Finn attended the Minnesota Transportation Alliance fly-in to Washington, D.C. in June. She participated in advocacy for federal transportation funding, as well as providing expertise for the elected officials and staff.

- Additionally, Anne Finn will be the National League of Cities representative to the National Fire Protection Association's Technical Committee. She will work to ensure that NFPA standards support the management of community risks that are appropriate for local governments' unique, individual needs.
- A final example of intergovernmental relations commitment to federal advocacy is Gary Carlson's efforts regarding municipal bonds. NLC staff identified tax-exempt municipal bonds as an important issue for 2017. The intergovernmental relations department drafted a letter in January urging support of municipal bonds to all Minnesota U.S. Representatives. Gary Carlson drafted a follow-up letter from the League Board president to U.S. Representative Erik Paulsen, who is particularly influential on this issue.
- Member Services: The coordination of LMC's staffing activities at the NLC November City Summit and March Congressional-City Conference, including arranging Capitol Hill meetings with members of the Minnesota delegation, is organized through Kevin Frazell in member services. The policy analysis department has also provided survey expertise and membership data analysis to support federal advocacy efforts.

Tasks Accomplished

The federal advocacy goals and work plan adopted by the LMC Board in January can be summarized in five areas: research, response, communicate, plan, and host. Below is a list of how LMC staff engaged in each of the areas over the past six months.

Research

- League staff conducted a survey regarding federal advocacy efforts of members.
- Documenting members' current activities helped staff identify areas of priority. The

survey received over 80 responses from member cities. The top federal areas of interest were:

- Infrastructure/transportation funding
 - Environmental issues
 - General grants and aid opportunities
 - Health care
 - Housing/workforce development
- League staff researched best practices on federal advocacy by reaching out to other state leagues and partner organizations, such as the Big 4 (MAT, AMC, and MSBA). This research provided the foundation for the recommendations to the League program.
- Staff compiled data on Minnesota's congressional delegation to serve as a reference for targeted outreach. This includes an extensive list of committee and caucus assignments for each member.
- Staff continues to provide legal research and expertise to members, including on federal issues. The research department is now tracking federal law inquiries from members. This will provide League staff with the ability to see what questions cities raise over time which also have connection to federal issues.

Respond

- When President Trump's federal budget was released, the City of Austin had questions on how it would affect Minnesota cities. The city was preparing for a meeting with Senator Franken to discuss the federal budget. League staff wrote a memo about the implications and provided it to the City of Austin within the day. Staff also utilized NLC's analysis of the budget and an advocacy guide prepared by NLC.

- League staff, particularly Pamela Whitmore and Laura Ziegler, spent many hours responding to the FCC Notice for Comments regarding small cell deployment. Their ability to quickly respond to a pressing issue should serve as a model for future work on the federal level.

Communicate

- Letters and emails are an essential part of communication with Congress. League staff sent a letter urging the Minnesota congressional representatives to protect tax-exempt municipal bonds by joining the municipal finance caucus. This bipartisan caucus ensures that states and local government have access to robust financing tools. It was founded to empower local government with ability to make decisions that promote infrastructure investment, job growth and economic prosperity.
- One-pagers are often prepared in advance of a meeting with a Congress member or staff. In preparation for the 2017 March NLC Congressional-City conference, the League created a Federal Issues one-pager with five federal priorities. The document was well received by congressional members and staff. The five priorities chosen for 2017 were:
 - Transportation funding: Support adequate and reliable long-term funding for infrastructure that reflects local needs and priorities.
 - Tax-exempt municipal bonds: Defend the tax exemption for municipal bonds as the primary financing mechanism for state and local governments.
 - Sales tax on online purchases: Close the online sales tax loophole by enacting e-fairness legislation.
 - Small cell wireless deployment: Ensure any changes to the local wireless facilities siting policies protect public assets in the interest of local taxpayers.

- Water infrastructure funding: Support additional funds for the state clean water and drinking water revolving loan accounts.
- To engage members and provide insight into the League's federal advocacy efforts, the "Federal Issues" tab of the website was updated. Communication staff continues to work to revise the information and resources on the League's website.

Plan

- Federal policymaking follows a similar cycle every year. Staff created a monthly calendar of recurring advocacy actions. This calendar of events will help plan for future advocacy activities.
- To organize and track federal advocacy, staff created a repository (in the LMC online database Aptify) for federal advocacy questions and agreed upon a process to document federal advocacy activities internally.

Host

- Past President Rhonda Pownell and Kevin Frazell attended the NLC fly-in in February to discuss city priorities with members of congress and federal agencies.
- LMC staff and city officials attended the Congressional-City Conference in March. LMC staff worked to support the advocacy efforts of the 60+ city officials who attended, including Capitol Hill meetings with the offices of both senators and six of the House members.
- National League of Cities staff, including the executive director and NLC midwest regional representative, attended LMC's annual conference in June. NLC and LMC staff strengthened their relationship during the three days of the conference.

- League staff hosted the Minnesota city officials who serve on NLC policy committees in March and again at the annual conference in June. The city officials in this group serve as highly engaged stakeholders in federal policy for the League. Hosting this group is a natural step in engaging Minnesota city officials in the League's federal advocacy.
- The League invited U.S. Congressional members to the August board meeting.

Future Federal Relations and Advocacy Recommendations

To advance the federal advocacy program, the League first should ensure federal focus through assignment of responsibility for overall coordination to one person in the IGR department. After this transition, the League will have the opportunity to develop its federal advocacy awareness and effectiveness. The League should prioritize the following activities:

Amplify the City Voice

Most cities in Minnesota do not have the resources to get their voice heard at the national level. The League can act as a strong voice and a watchdog on behalf of Minnesota cities of all sizes. By working with NLC and the Minnesota congressional delegation, the League can provide a united voice on federal issues for Minnesota cities. Cities look to the League for a central location to amplify the city perspective in federal lawmaking.

Continue Relationship with NLC Policy Committee Members

The League should continue to communicate with the Minnesota city officials involved in National League of Cities policy committees. The League has coordinated meetings with this group in March and June of 2017. Staff should schedule another meeting in the fall to continue its relationship with the NLC policy committee members.

Organize Events

League of Minnesota Cities members have expressed interest in attending events and meetings involving federal officials. There are opportunities to accomplish this within the League's existing conferences. Members of Congress and their staff should be invited to the 2017 fall regional meetings, to engage with members and League staff. In the long-term, perhaps next year, the League should organize events within each congressional district to help city officials build a relationship with their congressional representative.

Build Federal Relationships

One of the most common advocacy tools is to develop relationships and work closely with federal legislative allies. The League should strive to maintain connections with the Minnesota congressional delegation and their staff. A natural starting point is to build on connections League staff has made on specific issues, such as broadband, environmental protection, and transportation. League staff should continue to commit to regularly checking in with the congressional staff they work with to establish the League as a partner and resource for local government.

Provide Federal News

The League should provide federal updates and information to members. The National League of Cities already monitors and distributes information on federal legislation. The League could pass on more of these news updates to members to keep all cities informed on national issues that impact cities. League staff also ought to communicate more with members about the staff's increased efforts in federal advocacy. Advocacy activities completed by League staff should be clearly identified and shared with members in order to engage all in the process.

Provide Resources for Federal Grant Process

The process of obtaining federal grants can be difficult. LMC members have suggested the League provide guidance and resources about the federal grant process. In the long-term, the League may want to consider the strategic pros and cons of providing resources to navigate the federal grant process.

Share Best Practices

One of the League's core roles is to connect members and share best practices regarding complicated federal-city issues that cities face. This technique can be used in federal advocacy by establishing a city-to-city partnership program to share best practices. Or the League could feature best practices in the League's publications. The League should make an effort to include more content regarding federal advocacy best practices and success stories in publications.

Resources**How to Prioritize Issues**

The League prioritizes state issues through member-driven policy committees. Federal policy should be no different. Member city priorities should remain the top issues for federal policy. In addition to member requests, issues that significantly impact cities as a whole – such as funding and appropriations – are important. The League should strive to support all cities' access to federal funding, without specifically supporting individual projects. This strategy will maintain fairness for all cities.

In addition to these ongoing priorities, League staff should focus on five federal issue priorities every year. Staff will focus attention on these timely and specific federal issues each year, as opposed to trying to cover every federal issue that affects cities. This narrowed approach

to federal advocacy will provide clear direction for the first few years of the federal advocacy initiative at LMC.

In July, League staff sent out a federal advocacy survey that helped clarify what types of issues members of the League prioritize. A representative sample of 81 cities were asked what federal issues are most important to their city. The top three issues were infrastructure needs, environmental issues, and federal funding assistance. These top issues should serve as a base for the 2018 federal priorities. Other issues that came up were health care changes, USDA relationships, housing development, broadband funding, international border issues, and public safety budgets. Staff should continue to monitor these issues. The federal advocacy survey worked well for staff in gathering ideas for starting the federal program and prioritizing issues.

Resources for Implementation

Below is a list of resources to assist with the implementation and expansion of the federal advocacy program at the League in the next few years. These resources can help provide a smooth transition for the IGR federal advocacy coordinator, and be used across the organization by the various staff members involved in federal advocacy.

- **Yearly Calendar:** A list of recurring activities to complete each year. Organized by month, this calendar will keep staff on track in the short-term. The calendar will indicate when to send welcome letters, invite elected officials to meetings, and monitor certain aspects of federal policy.
- **NLC Advocacy Toolkit:** Found on the NLC University website, this toolkit provides all the basics for federal advocacy. Members can understand how to write or call Congress, schedule a meeting, or set up a site visit to their city hall. This toolkit should be easily found on the LMC website for members.

- **Communications:** The League already has a variety of communication modes with members. Federal advocacy should become a regular topic in this communication to increase awareness of and curiosity about federal advocacy. Platforms such as the website, magazine, social media accounts, and bulletin updates should include federal components. The Federal Strategies document should help lay some ground rules on how to integrate the federal priorities into communications at the League.
- **Research and Documents:** To the extent that the League has the resources to produce documents and research to assist cities in federal advocacy, it should. Examples of these types of resources are:
 - An About LMC one-pager that cities and League staff can use to introduce the League to congressional elected officials and their staff.
 - The Federal Issues Highlights one-pager that prioritizes five issues to focus on when advocating for local government.
 - Extensive responses to city questions on federal issues. If a city asks a question about federal policy, the League should be able to respond and prepare supporting documents and resources. This is especially true for the five priority issues identified each year. Staff should have extensive information prepared for each of the priority issues.

Evaluative Criteria

It is important to have concrete evaluative criteria to show progress. The League's federal advocacy program is, ultimately, an experiment. Like any good experiment, the program should be evaluated and assessed. While policy change is a long-term process (Baumgartner, 2009), this

should not deter the League from keeping good records of data and communication. The League should monitor progress on the advocacy goals adopted in January 2017, which are:

- To increase effectiveness and influence on federal issues that impact Minnesota cities.
- To create greater awareness of federal issues within staff and members.
- To strengthen communication and relationships with the federal delegation and their staff.

Each of these goals should continue to shape the federal advocacy program. Key staff should continue to meet monthly to report on projects and progress of the goals. The League might also put together an annual scorecard showing progress on the three goals. Below are recommendations on evaluative criteria for each goal.

Goal #1: To increase effectiveness and influence on federal issues that impact Minnesota cities. As mentioned before, the Minnesota congressional delegation has a limited amount of influence. Therefore, the League's effectiveness should be measured via its involvement in the National League of Cities. The number of communications and collaborations with NLC should increase. Minnesota should also strive to have more cities become full members of NLC. The League of Minnesota Cities should also encourage or actively recruit officials to serve on NLC policy committees and the executive board, and to attend conferences. These numbers will provide solid insight into how engaged members from Minnesota are in NLC, and therefore gauge Minnesota's influence on the national level.

Goal #2: To create greater awareness of federal issues within staff and members. To measure awareness, the League should quantify what city officials are communicating about. Reports can be pulled from the online Aptify database on how many questions were asked pertaining to federal policy from member cities. Social media can also become a tool for

calculating how members engage with federal policy. Counting retweets on a federal issue or views on an article regarding a federal policy could be a potential measurement. Another possibility is a member survey. In July, staff sent out a federal advocacy survey to all member city mayors and city administrators/managers. The survey gathered helpful feedback for starting the federal advocacy program. The survey could become a routine way of reaching members on federal advocacy.

Goal #3: To strengthen communication and relationships with the federal delegation and their staff. To measure this goal, the number of communications should be tracked throughout the year. Any letters, phone calls, or emails with Congress should be documented in the League's Aptify database and Federal Advocacy folder. Staff can run reports on the number and type of communications with Congress over time.

Outcomes

The League's major federal advocacy goal is to be able to respond to a federal issue in one day. This requires dedicated staff, communication, research, and other resources. The cost of using the resources should be weighed against the benefits of having an established federal program. In other words, how many resources should be used to justify a good federal policy service and response? This is a cost-benefit analysis question. The minimum level of effectiveness for the federal advocacy program is awareness, obtained simply through monitoring federal legislation. The League might decide it should obtain one policy success per legislative session to justify the program. This should be an important point of discussion for LMC staff and board.

Given a responsive congressional delegation and NLC as a resource, the probability of a poorly built federal advocacy program at the League is unlikely. The biggest challenge might be

keeping enthusiasm and political support high as time passes. To prevent a lull in enthusiasm, the League should put a high priority on communication with city members about federal activities and host events with congressional members.

The costs of failure of the federal advocacy program would be minimal. The League is an experimental organization, and members generally understand that the League will try some programs that might not work out. Because one of the guiding principles for the federal advocacy program was to keep costs to a minimum, no new major investments are expected. If implemented correctly, the League has little to lose by investing resources into federal advocacy.

The benefits of a well-run federal advocacy program are plentiful. Of the 81 responses from the federal advocacy survey, most members answered that the League could assist cities with their federal advocacy. The survey showed that members have the need for federal information, and the interest to take advocacy action. The League needs to respond to this need by increasing its federal advocacy efforts.

Another benefit is the ability to influence federal policy. As the League develops a successful advocacy program, its expertise in local governments will be sought out by federal policy-makers. The League will have the ability to influence aspects of policy making. Influence is the end goal of a developed advocacy or lobbying organization. The federal government makes decisions that affect cities and citizens every day. The League strives to have its voice heard at the federal level, and to have influence on those important decisions.

Federal advocacy also supports the League's national reputation. Only a handful of state leagues are known for a proactive federal advocacy program. By joining their exceptional colleagues, the League of Minnesota Cities will reaffirm its reputation as an organization dedicated to excellent service, and a leader in responding to changing times.

Conclusion

The federal advocacy program at the League of Minnesota Cities started as an organizational goal of the executive director in 2016. Since then, the program has grown to include a designated staff member and has engaged almost all departments at the League. The program has many areas for improvement, and the recommendations in this report are aimed at achieving this potential.

References

Baumgartner, F. R., et al. (2009). *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kingdon, J. W. (2003). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. New York: Longman Pub Group.

Leech, B. L. (2014). *Lobbyists at Work*. New York City: Apress.

Preston, M. (2003). *Local Leaders Lean on D.C. Lobbyist*. American City and Town. Atlanta: Penton.